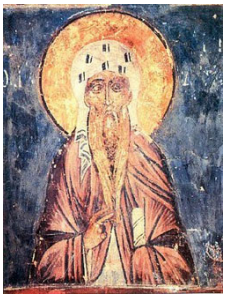
Acacius of Constantinople

(c. 472 – 26 November 489)



BRIEFING

Acacius of Constantinople (Greek: Ἀκάκιος; died 26 November 489) served as the patriarch of Constantinople from 472 to 489. He was practically the first prelate in the East and was renowned for his ambitious participation in the Chalcedonian controversy. His controversial attempts at healing the theological divisions led to the Acacian schism and his being condemned by the Chalcedonian churches. He is revered as a saint in Oriental Orthodoxy.

Acacius advised the Byzantine emperor Zeno to issue the Henotikon Edict in 482, which condemned Nestorius of Constantinople and Eutyches, accepted the Twelve Chapters of Cyril of Alexandria and ignored the Chalcedonian Definition. Though the Henotikon aimed to resolve the conflict surrounding the Chalcedon council's orthodoxy, it ultimately failed. Pope Felix III considered Acacius' slighting of Chalcedon and his predecessor Pope Leo I to be an affront to the prestige of his Holy See. Acacius was condemned and deposed by Pope Felix III, an action which was met with contempt by Acacius and resulted in a schism between the two sees, which continued after Acacius's death. The schism extended throughout the tumultuous reign of the Byzantine emperor Anastasius I Dicorus and was only resolved by emperor Justin I under Pope Hormisdas in 519.

The Coptic Orthodox Church celebrates The Departure of St. Acacius, Patriarch of Constantinople on the 30th of the Coptic month of Hathor.

EARLY LIFE AND EPISCOPATE

Acacius first appearers in authentic history as the *orphanotrophos*, or an official entrusted with the care of the orphans, in the Church of Constantinople, which he administered with conspicuous success. Suda describes him as magnificent, generous, suave, noble, courtly, and showy.

The Roman emperor Leo I took notice of his abilities and, using the skills of an accomplished courtier, gained considerable influence over him, leading to his succession as Patriarch on the death of Gennadius of Constantinople in 471. The initial five to six years of his episcopate were unremarkable. However, he soon became embroiled in controversies which lasted throughout his patriarchate, culminating in a thirty-five-year (484–519) schism between the East and West churches.

He sought, first, to restore the unity of the Church, which had been divided by the divisions caused by the Eutychian debates; and, secondly, to increase the authority of his see by asserting its independence from Rome and extending its influence over Alexandria and Antioch. In terms of his actions, he seems to have behaved more like a statesman than a theologian.

CHALCEDONIAN CONTROVERSY

Allied opposition against Basiliscus and Timothy II of Alexandria

Acacius gained enthusiastic popular support and praise from Pope Simplicius due to his opposition to the usurped Roman emperor Basiliscus. Alongside the stylite monk, Daniel the Stylite, he led the opposition against the usurped emperor Basiliscus. Timothy II of Alexandria, the non-Chalcedonian patriarch of Alexandria under the protection of emperor Basiliscus since 476, had already induced Basiliscus to issue an encyclical or imperial proclamation (*egkyklios*) condemning the teaching of the Council of Chalcedon. Acacius initially hesitated to add his name to the list of Asiatic bishops who had previously signed the encyclical. However, he reconsidered this position and became actively involved in the debate after receiving a letter from Pope Simplicius. The pope had been alerted to Acacius' uncertain stance by the vigilant monastic party. This sudden change of allegiance improved his reputation among the public and gained him favour with the Chalcedonian faction, especially among the different monastic groups in the East, due to his overt commitment to sound doctrine. He even received a letter of endorsement from Pope Simplicius.

The main reason for Acacius' sudden surge in popularity was his skillful ability to lead the movement which Daniel the Stylite was both the leader and inspiration of. The uproar was undoubtedly spontaneous among the monastic promoters and the general public who genuinely abhorred Eutychian views on the Incarnation. However, it remains uncertain whether Acacius, who was now in opposition to the Chalcedonians, or later, in his attempts at compromise, was anything more complex than a politician trying to

achieve his own personal ends. He lacked a consistent understanding of theological principles and had a gambler's mindset, playing solely for influence. Ultimately, Basiliscus was defeated.

Basiliscus retracted his offensive decree through a counter-proclamation, but his submission did not save him. Subsequently, the emperor Zeno, who was in exile until Acacius' opposition, regained the throne he had lost; and Basiliscus, after abject and futile concessions to the ecclesiastical power, was handed over to him (as tradition has it) by Acacius, having taken refuge in his church in 477. At this point, the relations between Zeno, Acacius and Simplicius seem to have been friendly. They agreed on the need to take vigorous measures to confirm the decrees of the Council of Chalcedon, and for a time they acted in unison.

Disputes over Peter III of Alexandria and John Talaia

In 479, Acacius consecrated the Patriarch of Antioch, thus exceeding the proper limits of his jurisdiction. Nevertheless, Pope Simplicius accepted the appointment, citing necessity.

Trouble erupted when the Non-Chalcedonian party of Alexandria tried to install Peter III of Alexandria as patriarch, instead of John Talaia, in 482. Simplicus objected to Peter III of Alexandria's appointment due to his affiliation with the Non-Chalcedonian party of Alexandria and declared his support for John Talaia.

Both candidates had notable drawbacks. Peter III had been a Non-Chalcedonian, and Talaia was bound by a solemn promise to the Emperor not to seek or (it would seem) accept the Patriarchate. Talaia immediately sought and obtained the support of Simplicius, and offended Acacius. Peter III assured Acacius that, if confirmed in his post, he would be able to heal the divisions caused by the dispute.

This occasion gave Acacius his long-awaited opportunity to claim honour and jurisdiction over the whole of the East, freeing the bishops of the capital from responsibility to the sees of Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem and the Roman Pontiff. Acacius, having fully won over Zeno, advised the emperor to support Peter III of Alexandria, despite Simplicius' strong opposition. Acacius then sent envoys to discuss the terms of reunion for all the churches of the East.

Henotikon Edict and the Acacian Schism

Shortly after, Acacius prepared a document or set of articles, which was at once a creed and an instrument of reunion, as his way of claiming jurisdiction over the whole of the East. This document, known to theologians as the Henotikon, was initially aimed at the opposing factions in Egypt, and was a call for reunion the grounds of restraint and compromise.

The Henotikon edict of 482 affirmed the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (i.e. the Nicene Creed as completed at Constantinople) as the common, definitive and unified symbol or expression of faith. All other symbola or mathemata were rejected; Eutyches and Nestorius were unequivocally condemned in an anathema, while the Twelve Chapters of Cyril of Alexandria were accepted. The teachings of Chalcedon were not repudiated, but rather simply ignored; Jesus Christ was described as the "only-begotten Son of God ... one and not two", and there was no explicit reference to the two natures.

Peter III of Alexandria accepted the Henotikon and was confirmed in his position. John Talaia refused to accept it and withdrew to Rome, where his support was taken up with great vigour by letters from Pope Simplicius urging Acacius to control the spread of heresy elsewhere and in Alexandria. The letters were in vain, and Simplicius died soon afterwards.

His successor, Pope Felix III, zealously championed Talaia's cause and sent two bishops, Vitalis and Misenus, to Constantinople with letters to Zeno and Acacius, demanding that the latter return to Rome to answer the charges brought against him by Talaia (Felix, Epp. 1, 2). The mission completely failed. Vitalis and Misenus were persuaded to publicly communicate (i.e. receive Holy Communion) with Acacius and the representatives of Peter III. In shame, they returned to Italy in 484.

Upon their arrival in Rome, a synod convened and vehemently denounced their actions. They were subsequently deposed and excommunicated. Furthermore, a new anathema was issued against Peter III, and Acacius was irrevocably excommunicated for his association with Pierre III, for exceeding the limits of his jurisdiction, and for refusing to answer the charges of Talaia at Rome; but no direct heretical opinion was proved or urged against him. Acacius was condemned by Pope Felix for committing a sin against the Holy Spirit and apostolic authority (*Habe ergo cum his ... portionem S. Spiritus judicio et apostolica auctoritate damnatus*). He was subsequently subjected to perpetual excommunication (*nunquamque anathematis vinculis exuendus*).

Felix sent the sentence to Acacius, and at the same time wrote to Zeno and to the Church of Constantinople, ordering everyone to separate from the deposed Patriarch on pain of excommunication. Meanwhile, an additional envoy, Tutus, was appointed to personally deliver the decree of double excommunication to Acacius. Acacius declined to accept the documents presented by Tutus and demonstrated his defiance of the authority of the Roman See and the Synod that had condemned him by erasing Pope Felix's name from the diptychs. Despite the threats from Felix, there were hardly any practical consequences, as the majority of Eastern Christians continued to remain in communion with Acacius.

Talaia agreed to become Bishop of Nola, effectively conceding defeat; meanwhile, Zeno and Acacius actively pursued the widespread adoption of the Henotikon throughout the East. Some (probably biased) sources say that Acacius, together with Zeno, began a brutal policy of violence and persecution, directed mainly against his old opponents, the monks, in order to achieve the general acceptance of the Henotikon. The condemnation of Acacius made in the name of the Pope, was repeated in the name of the Council of Chalcedon, and the schism was complete in 485. Acacius disregarded the sentence to the day of his death in 489, which was followed by those of Mongus in 490 and Zeno in 491.

His successor, Fravitta of Constantinople, entered into negotiations with Felix during a very brief patriarchate, but to no avail. The policy of Acacius failed when he could no longer implement it. In a short span of years, all his efforts were undone. The Henotikon was unsuccessful in reestablishing unity in the East, and in 519, Byzantine emperor Justin I deferred to Pope Hormisdas, and the condemnation of Acacius was recognised by the Church of Constantinople.

HENOTIKON

The ***Henotikon*** (/həˈnɒtɪkən/ or /həˈnɒtɪˌkɒn/ in English; Greek ἑνωτικόν *henōtikón* "act of union") was a christological document issued by Byzantine emperor Zeno in 482, in an unsuccessful attempt to reconcile the differences between the supporters of the Council of Chalcedon and the council's opponents (Non-Chalcedonian Christians). It was followed by the Acacian schism.

History

In 451, the Council of Chalcedon settled christological disputes by condemning both Monophysitism, held by Eutyches, and Nestorianism. However, large sections of the Eastern Roman Empire, especially in Egypt, but also in Palestine and Syria, held miaphysite views. In order to restore unity, the Patriarch of Constantinople, Acacius, devised an irenic formula, which Emperor Zeno promulgated without the approval of a synod of bishops. The *Henotikon* endorsed the condemnations of Eutyches and Nestorius made at Chalcedon and explicitly approved the twelve anathemas of Cyril of Alexandria, but avoided any definitive statement on whether Christ had one or two natures, attempting to appease both sides of the dispute.

This act failed to satisfy either side. All sides took offence at the Emperor openly dictating church doctrine, although the Patriarch of Antioch was pressured into subscribing to the *Henotikon*. When Patriarch John I of Alexandria refused, the Emperor had him expelled and instead recognized the Miaphysite Peter Mongos, who accepted the *Henotikon*. However, other miaphysites abandoned Mongos and were thenceforth called *Akephaloi* (headless ones), since they had lost their leader. After two years of prevarication and temporizing by Acacius, Pope Felix III of Rome condemned the act and excommunicated Acacius (484), although this was largely ignored in Constantinople, even after the death of Acacius in 489.

Zeno died in 491. His successor Anastasius I was sympathetic to the monophysites, and accepted the *Henotikon*. However, Anastasius's position was at odds with the predominantly Chalcedonian population of Constantinople, and Vitalian, a Chalcedonian general, attempted to overthrow him in 514. Anastasius then attempted to heal the schism with Pope Hormisdas, but this failed when Anastasius refused to recognize the excommunication of the now deceased Acacius. Vitalian tried to overthrow the emperor a second time, but he was defeated by loyal officers.

The schism caused by the *Henotikon* was officially settled in 519 when Emperor Justin I recognized the excommunication of Acacius and reunited the Chalcedonian churches. However, the then-Patriarchs of Alexandria and Antioch still embraced miaphysitism, and their churches came to be known in modern times as the Oriental Orthodox Churches. Meanwhile, the incident did nothing to mend the growing rift between the churches of Constantinople and Rome, which would lead in later centuries to the East-West Schism.

ACACIAN SCHISM

The **Acacian schism**, between the Eastern and Western Christian Churches, lasted 35 years, from 484 to 519. It resulted from a drift in the leaders of Eastern Christianity toward Miaphysitism and Emperor Zeno's unsuccessful attempt to reconcile the parties with the *Henotikon*. The events are described in letters in the Collectio Avellana.

In the events leading up to the schism, Pope Felix III wrote two letters, one to Emperor Zeno and one to Patriarch Acacius of Constantinople, reminding them of the need to defend the faith without compromise, as they had done previously. When former patriarch John Talaia, exiled from Alexandria, arrived in Rome and reported on what was happening in the East, Felix wrote two more letters, summoning Acacius to Rome to explain his conduct. The legates who brought these letters to Constantinople were imprisoned as soon as they landed and forced to receive communion from Acacius as part of a liturgy in which they heard Peter Mongus and other Miaphysites named in the diptychs. Felix, having heard of this from the Acoemetae monks in Constantinople, held a synod in 484 in which he denounced his legates and deposed and excommunicated Acacius.

Acacius replied to this act by striking Felix's name from his diptychs. Only the Acoemeti in Constantinople stayed loyal to Rome, and Acacius put their abbot, Cyril, in prison. Acacius died in 489, and his successor Flavitas tried to reconcile himself with Rome but refused to give up communion with Miaphysites and to omit Acacius' name in his diptychs. Felix's successor Gelasius also refused any compromise as a betrayal of the Council of Chalcedon.

Zeno died in 491; his successor Anastasius I Dicorus began by keeping the policy of the *Henotikon*, though he was a Miaphysite. After Anastasius' death, his successor Justin I immediately sought to end the schism with Rome, a goal shared by the new Patriarch of Constantinople, John of Cappadocia. A papal legation under Germanus of Capua was sent to Constantinople. The reunion was formalized on Easter, March 24, 519.

HYPOSTATIC UNION

Hypostatic union (from the Greek: ὑπόστασις *hypóstasis*, 'person, subsistence') is a technical term in Christian theology employed in mainstream Christology to describe the union of Christ's humanity and divinity in one hypostasis, or individual personhood.

In the most basic terms, the concept of hypostatic union states that Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully man. He is simultaneously perfectly divine and perfectly human, having two complete and distinct natures at once.

The Athanasian Creed recognized this doctrine and affirmed its importance by stating:

He is God from the essence of the Father, begotten before time; and he is human from the essence of his mother, born in time; completely God, completely human, with a rational soul and human flesh; equal to the Father as regards divinity, less than the Father as regards humanity. Although he is God and human, yet Christ is not two, but one. He is one, however, not by his divinity being turned into flesh, but by God's taking humanity to himself. He is one, certainly not by the blending of his essence, but by the unity of his person. For just as one human is both rational soul and flesh, so too the one Christ is both God and human.

Hypostasis

The Greek term *hypostasis* (ὑπόστασις) had come into use as a technical term prior to the Christological debates of the late fourth and fifth centuries. In pre-Christian times, Greek philosophy (primarily Stoicism) used the word. Some occurrences of the term *hypostasis* in the New Testament foreshadow the later, technical understanding of the word. Although it can translate literally as "substance", this has been a cause of some confusion; accordingly the New American Standard Bible translates it as "subsistence". *Hypostasis* denotes an actual, concrete existence, in contrast to abstract categories such as Platonic ideals.

In Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*, the dual nature of Christ is explored as a paradox, i.e. as "the ultimate paradox", because God, understood as a perfectly good, perfectly wise, perfectly powerful being, fully became a human, in the Christian understanding of the term: burdened by sin, limited in goodness, knowledge, and understanding. This paradox can only be resolved, Kierkegaard believed, by a leap of faith away from one's understanding and reason towards belief in God.

As the precise nature of this union is held to defy finite human comprehension, the hypostatic union is also referred to by the alternative term "mystical union".

Through history

Apollinaris of Laodicea was the first to use the term hypostasis in trying to understand the Incarnation. Apollinaris described the union of the divine and human in Christ as being of a single nature and having a single essence — a single hypostasis.

In the 5th century, a dispute arose between Cyril of Alexandria and Nestorius in which Nestorius claimed that the term *theotokos* could not be used to describe Mary, the mother of Christ. Nestorius argued for two distinct substances or hypostases, of divinity and humanity, in Christ. He maintained that divinity could not be born from a human because the divine nature is unoriginate. The Council of Ephesus in 431, under the leadership of Cyril himself as well as the Ephesian bishop Memnon, labeled Nestorius a neo-adoptionist, implying that the man Jesus is divine and the Son of God only by grace and not by nature, and deposed him as a heretic. In his letter to Nestorius, Cyril used the term "hypostatic" (Greek, καθ᾽ ὑπόστασιν *kath' hypóstasin*) to refer to Christ's divine and human natures being one, saying, "We must follow these words and teachings, keeping in mind what 'having been made flesh' means .... We say ... that the Word, by having united to himself hypostatically flesh animated by a rational soul, inexplicably and incomprehensibly became man." Cyril also stressed on "μία φύσις τοῦ θεοῦ λόγου σεσαρκωμένη, meaning "one physis ["nature"] of the Word of God made flesh" (or "one physis of God the Word made flesh")"

The preeminent Antiochene theologian Theodore of Mopsuestia, contending against the monophysite heresy of Apollinarism, is believed to have taught that in Christ there are two natures (dyophysite), human and divine, and two corresponding hypostases (in the sense of "subject", "essence" but not "person") which co-existed. However, in Theodore's time the word *hypostasis* could be used in a sense synonymous with *ousia* (which clearly means "essence" rather than "person") as it had been used by Tatian and Origen. The Greek and Latin interpretations of Theodore's Christology have come under scrutiny since the recovery of his *Catechetical Orations* in the Syriac language.

In 451, the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon promulgated the Chalcedonian Definition. It agreed with Theodore that there were two natures in the Incarnation. However, the Council of Chalcedon also insisted that hypostasis be used as it was in the Trinitarian definition: to indicate the person (prosopon) and not the nature as with Apollinaris.

The Oriental Orthodox Churches, having rejected the Chalcedonian Definition, were known as Miaphysites because they maintain the Cyrilian definition that characterized the incarnate Son as having one nature. The Chalcedonian "in two natures" formula (based, at least partially, on Colossians 2:9) was seen as derived from and akin to a Nestorian Christology. Contrariwise, the Chalcedonians saw the Oriental Orthodox as tending towards Eutychian Monophysitism. However, the Oriental Orthodox persistently specified that they have never believed in the doctrines of Eutyches, that they have always affirmed that Christ's humanity is consubstantial with our own, and they thus prefer the term Miaphysite to be referred to as a reference to Cyrillian Christology, which used the phrase "μία φύσις τοῦ θεοῦ λόγου σεσαρκωμένη", "*mía phýsis toû theoû lógou sesarkōménē*". The term *miaphysic* means *one united nature* as opposed to one singular nature (monophysites). Thus the Miaphysite position maintains that although the nature of Christ is from two, it may only be referred to as one in its incarnate state because the natures always act in unity.

In 1989 and 1990, leaders from the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox churches signed joint statements in an attempt to work towards reunification (for more, see Miaphysitism). Likewise the leaders of the Assyrian Church of the East, which venerates Nestorius and Theodore, in 1994 signed a joint agreement with leaders of the Roman Catholic Church acknowledging that their historical differences were over terminology rather than the actual intended meaning.

HYPOSTASIS

Hypostasis (plural: hypostases), from the Greek ὑπόστασις (*hypóstasis*), is the underlying, fundamental state or substance that supports all of reality. It is not the same as the concept of a substance.[*citation needed*] In Neoplatonism, the hypostasis of the soul, the intellect (*nous*) and "the one" was addressed by Plotinus. In Christian theology, the Holy Trinity consists of three hypostases: that of the Father, that of the Son, and that of the Holy Spirit.

Ancient Greek philosophy

Pseudo-Aristotle used "hypostasis" in the sense of material substance.

Neoplatonists argue that beneath the surface phenomena that present themselves to our senses are three higher spiritual principles (or *hypostases*): each one more sublime than the preceding. For Plotinus, these are the Soul, the Intellect, and the One.

Christian theology

The term *hypostasis* has particular significance in Christian theology; particularly in Christian triadology—the study of the Christian doctrine of the trinity—as well as Christology (study of Christ).

In Christian triadology, three specific theological concepts have emerged throughout history in reference to the number and interrelationship of the *hypostases*:

The *monohypostatic* (or *miahypostatic*) concept advocates that the Father, Son, and Spirit are one single *hypostasis*[8][9] in a single *ousia*—meaning that the Father, Son, and Spirit are a single Person. Historically, there were variations of this view:

- The second-century Monarchians believed that "Father" and "Son" are two names for the same God.[*citation needed*]

- In the third century, Sabellius taught that the Father, Son, and Spirit are three parts of one *hypostasis*.[*citation needed*]
Among the pre-Nicene Church Fathers, "Dionysius of Rome ... said that it is wrong to divide the divine monarchy 'into three ... separated *hypostases* ... people who hold this in effect produce three gods'."

In the fourth century, Sabellians (such as Eustathius and Marcellus,), Alexander, Athanasius, and the Western Church taught a single hypostasis in God. The "clear inference from [Athanasius'] usage" is that "there is only one hypostasis in God." Some leading scholars claim that even the Nicene Creed professes a 'one hypostasis' theology.

The *Dyohypostatic* concept advocates that God has two hypostases (Father and Son); When the fourth-century Controversy began, the focus was only on the Son, not on the Holy Spirit. Later in that century, some groups, such as the Macedonians, accepted the Son as fully divine but not the Holy Spirit. This is why in AD 381, during the First Council of Constantinople, the Nicene Creed[*citation needed*] was revised to be explicit, the final word, on the deity of the Holy Spirit.

The *Trihypostatic* (tri=three; hypo=upon; static = a stationary situation of being such that it is a foundation upon which forces arise?) concept, that is, idea, advocates that God has three of these spaces (Father, Son and the Holy Spirit), each having the same *ousia*, that is (i.e.), one Divine nature or true being, substance, being, existence. After Sabellianism was condemned in the third century, Origen's three-hypostases view dominated. The Eusebians (traditionally but erroneously called 'Arians') believed in three hypostases. The leaders of the Eusebians were Eusebius of Caesarea and Eusebius of Nicomedia. In this view, Father, Son, and Spirit are three distinct minds. For example, the Eastern Dedication Creed says, "They are three in *hypostasis* but one in agreement." (Hanson, p. 286) "Agreement" implies distinct minds.

There were also variations of the 'three hypostases' view. "What is conventionally regarded as the key-word in the Creed homoousion, falls completely out of the controversy very shortly after the Council of Nicaea and is not heard of for over twenty years." (Hanson Lecture) Athanasius re-introduced the term into the debate in the 350s, some 30 years after Nicaea. This caused the Eusebians to divide into various views. Some said the Father's and Son's substances are unlike (heterousios). Others said their substances are similar (homoiousios). Still others refused to talk about substance (the Homoians).

The Cappadocian fathers were the first pro-Nicenes to believe in three hypostases. For example, Basil of Caesarea said that the Son's statements that he does the will of the Father "is **not because He lacks deliberate purpose or power of initiation**" but because "**His own will** is connected in indissoluble union with the Father."

This dispute about the number of hypostases in God was at the core of the 'Arian' Controversy. Both traditional Trinity doctrine and the Arians taught three distinct hypostases in the Godhead. The difference is that, in the Trinity doctrine, they are one also identified as a single Being.

Hypostasis is the individual aspect of ousia, this means ousia is the parent characteristic that is shared by the hypostasis under it. Ousia can be shared by numerous hypostases, as hypostasis is the individual expression of that ousia just how ego is an expression of the underlying soul. In this case it's clear to see that the ego and the soul are seemingly different as well as the same thing for the ego is not without the soul, they can however coexist. Ousia is the nature of that existence and all things that exist have ousia, as it's the nature of that existence in the way that it exists. Ousia is what makes a rock a rock and hypostasis is the various kinds of rocks; ousia is the form as well as nature of particles that construct an entity in the case of physical phenomena. On the other hand for spiritual phenomena it's the level of presence & creative force that differentiates one ousia from another. Like it has been said earlier this nature of existence(ousia) maybe shared by various hypostasis or instances of ousia.

Hypostasis is not the same as type or part, a Hypostasis holds all the nature described by its ousia. This means the ousia is equally possessed by each hypostasis & in that sense they are all the same. Each hypostasis is one as well as many at once. This is because all of them hold the same ousia, the difference is in their expressions of it.

These terms originate from Greek philosophy, where they essentially had the same meaning, namely, the fundamental reality that supports all else. In a Christian context, this concept may refer to *God* or the *Ultimate Reality*.

The Bible never refers to God's *ousia* and only once to God's *hypostasis* (Hebrews 1:3). In Hebrews 1:3, it is not clear whether *hypostasis* refers to God's nature or His entire 'Person' (hypostasis) and is variously translated.

In early Christian writings, hypostasis was used to denote 'being' or 'substantive reality' and was not always distinguished in meaning from terms like *ousia* ('essence'), substantia ('substance') or qnoma (specific term in Syriac Christianity). It was used in this way by Tatian and Origen. Tertullian, writing in Latin, did not use the Greek terms hypostasis and ousia but he did use the related term *substantia.*
The Nicene Creed of 325, in one of its anathemas, used the terms hypostasis and ousia:

> *"But as for those ... who assert that the Son of God is of a different* ***hypostasis or substance*** *[ousia] ... these the Catholic and apostolic Church anathematizes." (Early Church Texts)*

These terms were not used by any previous creed. At the time of the Nicene Creed, different people used these terms differently. Many used them as synonyms. Importantly, Athanasius, the main custodian of the Nicene Creed, also used these terms as synonyms. It is, therefore, not surprising that one of the anathemas in the Creed seems to use these terms as synonyms. However, since they were used as synonyms, the Early Church Texts, which translates ousia as 'substance' is misleading. As mentioned below, the meanings of these terms changed during the Arian Controversy and what Early Church Texts does is to apply the later developed meanings of these terms to the Nicene Creed:

> *[The two terms] "did not mean, and should not be translated, 'person' and 'substance', as they were used when at last the confusion was cleared up and these two distinct meanings were permanently attached to these words."*

As stated, when the Arian controversy began and for much of the fourth century, *hypostasis* and *ousia* were synonyms. However, later in that century, a clear distinction was made between the two terms. The three Cappadocian Fathers, Basil of Caesarea (330 to 379), Gregory of Nazianzus (329 to 389), and Gregory of Nyssa (335 to about 395) who was one of Basil's younger brothers, are traditionally credited for being the first to make a clear distinction between ousia and hypostasis, particularly Basil of Caesarea, namely in his letters 214 (375 AD) and 236 (376 AD)

However, Arius and Asterius were two Eusebians who made that distinction much earlier. However, Basil of Caesarea was the first pro-Nicene to make that distinction. While Basil was a three-hypostasis theologian, Athanasius and the earlier pro-Nicene theologians were one-hypostasis theologians and did not need a distinction between hypostasis and ousia.

However, the Cappadocians did not yet understand God as one undivided ousia (substance), as in the Trinity doctrine. They said that the Father, Son, and Spirit have exactly the same type of substance, but each has his own substance. Basil began his career as theologian as a Homoiousian. As such, he believed that the Son's substance is similar to the Father's, meaning two distinct hypostases. Later, after he had accepted homoousios (same substance), he retained the idea of two distinct hypostases:

> *He says that in his own view '**like in respect of ousia**' (the slogan of the party of Basil of Ancyra) was an acceptable formula, provided that the word '**unalterably**' was added to it, for then it would be equivalent to homoousios." "Basil himself prefers homoousios." "Basil has moved away from but has not completely repudiated his origins.*

This means that Basil understood homoousios in a generic sense of two beings with the same type of substance, rather than two beings sharing one single substance. Consequently, he explained that the distinction between *ousia* and *hypostases* is the same as that between the general and the particular; as, for instance, between the animal and the particular man.

> *"In the DSS [Basil] discusses the idea that the distinction between the Godhead and the Persons is that between an abstract essence, such as humanity, and its concrete manifestations, such as man."*

Basil "argued that [homoousios] was preferable because it actually **excluded identity of *hypostases***. This, with the instances which we have already seen in which Basil compared the relation of *hypostasis* to *ousia* in the Godhead to that of particular to general, or of a man to 'living beings', forms the strongest argument for Harnack's *hypothesis*." "Harnack ... argued that Basil and all the Cappadocians interpreted *homoousios* only in a 'generic' sense ... that unity of substance was turned into equality of substance."

The terms ousia and hypostasis are foundational in the Trinity doctrine. Hanson described the traditional Trinity doctrine as follows:

> *"The champions of the Nicene faith ... developed a doctrine of God as a Trinity, as one substance or ousia who existed as three hypostases, three distinct realities or entities (I refrain from using the misleading word 'Person'), three ways of being or modes of existing as God."*

Hanson explains hypostases as 'ways of being' or 'modes of existing' but says that the term 'person' is misleading. As the term is used in English, each 'person' is a distinct entity with his or her own mind and will. This is not equivalent to the concept of hypostasis in the Trinity doctrine because, in that doctrine, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are a single Being with a single mind. For example, Karl Rahner, a leading catholic scholar, said:

> *"The element of **consciousness** ... does not belong to it [the Person] in our context [the official doctrine of the {Catholic} Church]." "But there exists in God only one power, **one will**, only **one self-presence**. ... Hence **self-awareness** is not a moment which distinguishes the divine "persons" one from the other."*

Consensus was not achieved without some confusion at first in the minds of Western theologians since in the West the vocabulary was different. Many Latin-speaking theologians understood *hypo-stasis* as 'sub-stantia' (substance); thus when speaking of three *hypostases* in the Godhead, they may have suspected three *substances* or tritheism. However, after the mid-fifth-century Council of Chalcedon, the word came to be contrasted with *ousia* and was used to mean 'individual reality', especially in the trinitarian and Christological contexts. The Christian concept of the Trinity is often described as being one God existing in three distinct *hypostases/personae/persons*.

Within Christology, two specific theological concepts have emerged throughout history, in reference to the Hypostasis of Christ:

- *Monohypostatic concept advocates that Christ has only one hypostasis;*

- *Dyohypostatic concept advocates that Christ has two hypostases (divine and human).*

John Calvin wrote: "The word ὑπόστασις which, by following others, I have rendered substance, denotes not, as I think, the being or essence of the Father, but his person; for it would be strange to say that the essence of God is impressed on Christ, as the essence of both is simply the same. But it may truly and fitly be said that whatever peculiarly belongs to the Father is exhibited in Christ, so that he who knows him knows what is in the Father. And in this sense do the orthodox fathers take this term, hypostasis, considering it to be threefold in God, while the essence (οὐσία) is simply one. Hilary everywhere takes the Latin word substance for person. But though it be not the Apostle's object in this place to speak of what Christ is in himself, but of what he is really to us, yet he sufficiently confutes the Asians and Sabellians; for he claims for Christ what belongs to God alone, and also refers to two distinct persons, as to the Father and the Son. For we hence learn that the Son is one God with the Father, and that he is yet in a sense distinct from him, so that a subsistence or person belongs to both."